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A Campaign Present

CPYRGHT *for Lyndonbird*

We note that even the leaks are Texas-size in LBJ Washington. No mere phrases dropped at a cocktail party or gossip spread in the washroom. Fifty thousand secret words of Jack Ruby's testimony siphoned from the Warren Commission to Dorothy Kilgallen and the Hearst press. Now a forty-five page Most Secret paper by Willard Matthias for CIA's supreme National Estimates Board: leaked to the *Chicago Tribune*, but then publicly released by CIA when it "became aware" that the *Tribune* had the paper and was going to publish it. Curious, somehow. You can't help thinking this Matthias episode may be a plant, not a leak. But who did the planting? The Administration itself? In principle, that would seem most likely. But in the specific case, it isn't so plausible that a Democratic White House would choose the arch-Republican *Tribune* to leak to. Then, the document itself: a totally pessimistic estimate of the Vietnamese war and a recommendation that we seek "neutralization." Why would the White House want that leaked at just this time, when LBJ is trying to exploit his "firmness" in the Tonkin air strike to touch up the public impression—confirmed as "his major handicap" in a survey last week by Samuel Lubell—that he is soft, shifting and weak? It's puzzling. Might the leak have come through a dissident determined to let the American public know what is planned for Southeast Asia, come an LBJ victory in November?

As for the Matthias analysis itself, made shortly after the June Honolulu conference on Vietnam, it merely confirms what NATIONAL REVIEW wrote at that time and repeated after the Tonkin affair: that the Administration was not making a strategic turn toward a serious policy, but only mounting a few minor military moves and a number of threats in an attempt to hold on until November, thereafter to head for neutralization as a cover for defeat and withdrawal. It begins to look as if even holding until November may not be possible on the present strategic premises. The Vietcong moves with impunity through the countryside. The cities are engulfed in riots that have shifted into open anti-Americanism. Khanh is on his way out, and there is no meaningful successor. There are signs that South Vietnam is on the brink of that utter social collapse into which a country can founder beyond piecing together.